

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
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RARE INDIAN COLLECTION COMES TO THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

An exciting exhibition of INDIAN PAINTINGS FROM RAJASTHAN will open at The Cleveland Museum of Art on September 30. The paintings have been assembled by Sri Gopi Krishna Kanoria, a private collector in Calcutta, and come from Rajasthan in Northern India and Malwa in the South. 72 paintings make up the exhibition which is being circulated by the Smithsonian Institution.

Until the late 19th century Rajasthan had not enjoyed the prestige among collectors that had been given the more refined expressions of the Mughal school. This was largely because Rajasthan paintings were not as well-known as those of the Mughal school which had been collected in Europe as well as in India for many years. Rajasthan paintings remained in the wealthy families and were passed from generation to generation often as dowries. By 1940 economic conditions had forced these families to sell their private collections. Kanoria then began collecting the works which comprise this exhibition.

These colorful small-scale paintings refresh the eye at a glance. The strong clear colors favored by the painters of Rajasthan have been applied with an uninhibited delight while the abundance of decorative detail in the landscape, architecture and costume has been imaginatively utilized. Preferred colors are full-bodied yellows, cobalt blues and superb reds. Trees are given pink or yellow trunks - hills are often a brilliant red or yellow. Some departures have iconographical significance such as representing male figures with blue or blue gray complexion to signify asceticism or a particular divinity. Scarlet is symbolic of impassioned romance while yellow is associated with the sun or spring. A calculated use of color and a purposeful distortion of the human form give these paintings an overall effect of formal richness, sophistication and vitality.

These paintings illustrate Hindi and Sanskrit texts. For this reason, a

verse of poetry is often placed at the top of the picture and in this respect suggest the illuminated manuscripts of Western Europe. The function of these paintings is the exact opposite of representation. The aim is either to tell a story, interpret a situation, or express a sense of poetry. Subjects so apparently diverse as the adventures of Rama, the Book of Fables, the career of Krishna, the divine lover, are illustrated alongside poems evoking the different modes of Indian music or describing the practices of lovers. In each case, only figures or objects essential to the subject are included, and the over-riding situation is indicated by the most simple and summary of symbols.

Therefore as in Western manuscript illumination and Flemish panel painting, full understanding depends to some extent upon knowledge of the symbolism of the subject matter. Detailed labels outline this iconography in the exhibition which as a whole provides a truly delightful glimpse into this little known realm of Indian painting.

The exhibition closes October 22.

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